



## **SARS**

(Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)

### **What is SARS?**

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. Over the next few months, the illness spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe and Asia before the SARS outbreak was contained.

### **Who is at risk for SARS?**

Currently, there is no known risk for SARS transmission anywhere in the world. The most recent human cases of SARS were reported in China in April 2004 in an outbreak resulting from laboratory-acquired infections. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and its partners, including the World Health Organization, continue to monitor the SARS situation globally.

### **What are the symptoms of SARS?**

SARS begins with a high fever (temperature higher than 100.4 degrees F). Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort and body aches. Some people also have mild respiratory symptoms at the outset. About 10 percent to 20 percent of patients have diarrhea.

After two to seven days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough. Most patients develop pneumonia.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually start two to seven days after infection with the virus, but they may take as long as 10 days to appear.

### **How is SARS spread?**

SARS mainly is spread is by close person-to-person contact. Another possible way SARS can be spread is by touching the skin of other people or objects that are contaminated with infectious droplets and then touching your eye(s), nose or mouth. This can happen when someone who is sick with SARS coughs and/or sneezes droplets onto themselves, other people or nearby surfaces. It also is possible that SARS can be spread more broadly through the air or by other ways that are currently not known.

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

Available information suggests that people with SARS are most likely to be contagious only when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. Typically, people are most contagious during the second week of illness. However, as a precaution against spreading the disease, CDC recommends that people with SARS limit their interactions outside the home (for example, by not going to work or to school) until 10 days after their fever has gone away and their breathing symptoms have gotten better.

### **How is a person diagnosed?**

Tests are available to determine if you have SARS, but at this time with no cases worldwide, most providers will not test for this illness.

## **What is the treatment?**

CDC currently recommends that patients with SARS receive the same treatment that would be used for any serious community-acquired unusual pneumonia.

## **Does past infection make a person immune?**

This is unknown at this time.

## **Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have SARS?**

Yes. A person should be excluded as soon as he or she is suspected to have the illness.

## **What can be done to prevent the spread of SARS?**

- Infection control precautions should be continued for SARS patients for 10 days after respiratory symptoms and fever are gone. SARS patients should limit their actions outside the home and should not go to work, school, out-of-home day care or other public areas during the 10-day period.
- During this 10-day period, all members of a household with a SARS patient should follow good hand hygiene, such as frequent hand washing or the use of alcohol-based hand rubs.
- A person with SARS should cover his or her mouth and nose with a tissue before sneezing or coughing. If possible, the patient should wear a surgical mask if he or she is in close contact people who are not ill. If the patient is unable to wear a surgical mask, other people in the home should wear masks when in close contact with the patient.
- Disposable gloves should be used for any contact with body fluids from a SARS patient. However, immediately after activities involving contact with body fluids, gloves should be removed and discarded, and hands should be washed. Gloves should not be washed or reused and are not intended to replace good hand hygiene.
- SARS patients should avoid sharing eating utensils, towels and bedding with other members of the household, although these items can be used by others after routine cleaning, such as washing or laundering with soap and hot water.
- Common household cleaners are sufficient for disinfecting toilets, sinks and other surfaces touched by patients with SARS, but the cleaners must be used frequently.
- Other members of the household do not need to restrict their outside activities unless they develop symptoms of SARS, such as a fever or respiratory illness.

## **Additional Information:**

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resource: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/faq.htm>

